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ABSTRACT

Literacy teaching and education of migrant workers and their children is an intense, emotional issue because the education of migrant workers is the point of intersection of two major social problems: education and immigration. Nonformal adult education radio and television programs have been set up in some countries to reach unemployed migrant workers. Host countries of children of foreign origin have developed educational systems that incorporate changes in structure, content, methods, teaching materials, and training of teachers. The following two questions remain: What more can schools do? What more can be accomplished by schools in liaison with other resources? The right to cultural identity is recognized in host countries, notably via courses in the language and culture of origin offered to students of foreign origin. These courses aim to facilitate the scholastic reintegration of children in the case of repatriation. It seems that host countries have come to the conclusion that pupils' knowledge of their culture of origin improves their ability to integrate and avoids the creation of a rift between these children and their parents. Openmindedness toward others becomes an essential element of all educational practice. Since 1970, the Council of Europe has devoted an important part of its educational activities to the education of migrants. (CML)

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LITERACY LESSONS

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INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

Literacy training of migrants and of their families and cultural identity

by Jean Valérien

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Literacy teaching and education of migrant workers and their children is an intense, emotional issue. This is not at all surprising in view of the fact that the education of migrant workers is the point of intersection of two major social problems, namely:

- education
- immigration

The educational institution today is examined, evaluated, criticized: everywhere it must cope with the qualitative and quantitative increase of society's demands upon it, without always knowing how to do so. This is particularly true in the case of the education of migrant workers and their families. Must schools be adapted so as to preserve the cultural identity of these persons, while at the same time guaranteeing scholastic success?

In the case of adults, their work has a legitimizing value while providing a means of livelihood. For those who came with their families, it is from schools that they expect genuine legitimization for their children. It is thanks to schooling that foreign children will find the keys to their existence. The implicit expectations on the part of parents vis-à-vis the school are very great, for they wish their children to become as integrated as possible in the school and in society, but without totally cutting ties with their parents' culture of origin because of the school, in which they owe it to themselves to succeed.

But the school does not always succeed in adapting to these specific, contradictory demands, and, since the parents most often will not have made sufficient effort to learn the language of the host country, they will not have the means of helping their children with schoolwork.

As a result, the terms 'scholastic failure' or simply 'failure' are pronounced too often and too resoundingly, despite many initiatives made at all levels: national, bilateral and international.

THE LITERACY OF MIGRANT WORKERS

Adult literacy remains a multi-facetted problem: a solution is hardly found for one problem, when another crops up for which we are totally unprepared.

In fact, the migrant population is in constant evolution, so much so that it is practically impossible to obtain credible figures which make it possible to estimate needs: a person who has a job may lose it and become an itinerant job-seeker, changing his place of residence with each promise of a new job. In addition, family members (wives, in particular) are sometimes difficult to reach. Finally, it is very difficult, by nature, to contact 'clandestine immigrants'.

For steady workers, literacy programmes are set up in the majority of host countries, either at the workplace during working hours, or in groups outside of work. Specific methods and appropriate teaching materials have been developed, and the courses are given by adequately trained teachers, trainers and instructors.

When a regular worker finds himself unemployed, as a result of the major industrial reorganization occurring in industrialized countries with the introduction of automation and new technology, his literacy alone is insufficient to allow him to find work, either in the host country or his country of origin. It is therefore necessary to link literacy and vocational training in order to obtain a recognized qualification. Such programmes have, for example, been set up in large enterprises (shipyards, automobile factories) in industrialized coun-

tries as an attempt to 'recycle' workers. But without basic training, the problem is difficult to solve once workers reach a certain age.

How can the jobless be reached? Non-formal education programmes via radio and television have been set up. In the United Kingdom, the BBC has had a pioneering role with regard to English instruction. Its broadcasts are designed to be used either alone or at home in conjunction with a textbook. However, the formation of groups was strongly suggested to follow the programmes collectively with the help of a monitor, either volunteer or paid, depending on the situation.

In France, in 1989, the French Ministry of Solidarity, Health and Welfare entrusted the task of broadcasting French language courses to local intercultural radio stations, which more often than not were operated by associations of migrant workers. These programmes were aimed mainly at the housewives of immigrants from the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia).

STICHTING TOLKENCENTRUM

'Stichting tolkencentrum' is a foundation covering the entire Netherlands, with offices in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Eindhoven, Utrecht and Hengelo. It was founded in 1976 to promote better understanding and comprehension through interpretation services. A permanent interpreters' hot line (Arabic, Turkish, etc.) exists, and a secretary can, if necessary, contact interpreters in other languages. Nights and Sundays all calls are forwarded to a switchboard which centralizes all the country's interpreters.

There are relatively few night calls, but each interpreter on average handles twenty to twenty-five calls per day of from several minutes to one-half hour duration. Staff consists of thirteen salaried interpreters and eighty free-lance interpreters. When they are hired, interpreters promise to be neutral, not to make use of what they learn for their own benefit, to refuse tips and other forms of remuneration, and to decline to work without the prior authorization of the Foundation.

The budget (18 million florins) is administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health and Culture.

A number of industrialized countries receiving foreign workers have set up special facilities to permit better social integration: welcoming services in public places (administration, post office, hospital); translation services for civil documents, interpretation services, the interpreter serving as an actual mediator between the foreigner and his interlocutor (hospital, legal system, etc.). In France, for example, the Migrants' Inter-service Association has organized an on-call interpretation service for the medical, social and administrative fields.

In the Netherlands, the public authorities have elaborated a 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week interpreters' service.

Thus, adult literacy takes on extremely varied forms, from classroom-type courses, with an instructor and teaching materials and a pre-determined syllabus, to reach-out activities, organized at the village or neighbourhood level, during fairs or parent-teacher meetings, via distance instruction (radio, television, telephone) and non-formal activities, such as organized acclimatization services, translation or interpretation. Despite this panoply of means, can we say that the problem of the literacy of adult migrants is dealt with adequately? Obviously not, since the target population constantly fluctuates and it is often impossible quantify, or even closely estimate it.

THE SCHOOLING OF MIGRANT CHILDREN

Educational activities destined for children of foreign origin stand downstream of a *chain of decisions* over which educators and schools have no control (political choices, bilateral agreements, regulations, etc.). Considerable progress has been made to offer the same educational rights and the same chances of success to migrant children in their host countries. The same cannot be said of 'repatriated' children, for whom the country of origin has neither the financial nor the human resources necessary to make their education systems evolve.

The education systems of host countries have had to evolve in order to take on the education of children of foreign origin, called, perhaps inaccurately, migrants of the second or third generation. These changes concern several levels, namely:

- *structure:* one of the first responses of the host country's school was to introduce special classes (orientation, initiation, adaptation) to permit accelerated learning of the host country's language in which the bulk of instruction would be given. These classes have been, and still are, the subject of intense debate, for they tend to accentuate the specificity and isolate individuals by their differentness. Thus, the newcomer is rapidly 'immersed' in a 'normal' class within the same age group, and is only 'regrouped' later in a special class for refresher training in the language.

- *content:* a promising approach consists in enriching the various disciplines by including the culture of origin and introducing into curricula the history of immigration.

- *methods:* the first modification concerns the teaching of the language of the host country. It has been observed that traditional or current methods are not necessarily appropriate, and the help of modern linguistics was enlisted, concerning the learning of foreign languages in particular. But here again, limitations were encountered so that ultimately a special method for teaching the language had to be invented and disseminated, with particular emphasis on communication in everyday life (factor of autonomy) and on the fact that the second language was the language of instruction for all subjects.

  Little by little, it has been realized that a truly open and effective educational approach must take the *learner as its focal point*, whereas the attention of educational scientists and teachers remains too often focused on the content and subject matter to be taught.

- *teaching material:* textbooks, written supports and teaching materials in use very often prove to be unsuitable, either because their cultural bias is too pronounced (resulting in rejection), or because they do not permit a teaching approach which focuses on the learner.

  Very often, in the host country, educators have designed, tested and produced more pertinent teaching materials.

  Beyond the tools used in the classroom, supports must also be created with the *families* in mind, in order to explain what the nature of the school is, how it functions and what its goals are. Much attention must also be given to documents and supports used in the *training of teachers.*

- *training:* the training of teachers is an essential response of the school to the problems raised by the education of migrant children. Having present or future teachers analyse their educational institu-

tions, providing them with information concerning the educational institutions of the country of origin and having them create supports and teaching materials, such are the tasks of centres which train new teachers or provide refresher training.

Some countries, such as France, have set up specialized training centres for teachers assigned to classes with a high percentage of foreign students, for example the CEFISEM (Centre d'Etude de Formation et d'Information sur la Scolarisation des Enfants de Migrants – Research Centre for Training and Information on the Education of Migrant Children), which have been genuine forces for stimulating awareness of the problems and finding solutions. Particular emphasis must be placed on training and informing educational supervisory personnel such as inspectors and principals. In the majority of situations, nothing is possible without their participation.

Of course, given these adjustments, the school is a place of learning where reading, writing and arithmetic are taught. But it is still first and foremost a place of social integration, and for children who are the product of immigration, it is the crucible in which successive waves are fused into one, it is the antechamber of social and professional success.

Is this to say that the problems associated with the education of the children of migrants are resolved by the school of the host country? This would certainly be a somewhat premature statement, for much still remains to be done. Pupils on the same bench, in the same classroom, in front of the same blackboard and the same teacher are still not all equal.

This problem is being debated in industrialized countries (in Europe, in particular) and numerous university research projects are being conducted on the subject. They show that the schooling of the children of migrants presents the same characteristics as that of young nationals of the *same social class*. It must be

emphasised that the problem is one of a social, and not merely of a linguistic or ethnic nature, as has long been asserted. Added to this is no doubt a cultural handicap, as we shall see presently.

Although schools in the host country have done much for the children of immigrants, two questions remain:

- *What more can schools do?*
  What have we learned from bilingual experiments, which enable children to develop a mastery of both the language of the host country and that of the country of origin? Can forms of instruction be used other than those of the classroom? Is it not possible to envisage support in the form of distance teaching, reliance on new technologies (radio, television, computer hook-ups, telematics, etc.) for the benefit of both pupils and their families?

- *What more can be accomplished by schools in liaison with other resources?*
  If the major problems encountered are of a social nature, it is evident that the school alone cannot solve them. Hence, a combined effort on the part of the school and the entire community is required, the families first of all, but also local organizations, associations, the services of ministries other than education, business, the media. A genuine partnership is required to ensure the scholastic success of the greatest number.

The situation is even more dramatic in the country of origin, in the case of repatriated children, because of a lack of human and material resources. For example, how can Malian schools reabsorb Arabic-speaking children schooled in Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, when the educational system is unable to provide education in French to even 50% of the 'enrollable' population? The problem is serious in the poorest countries. It is arous-

ing more and more concern in intermediate countries: Portugal and Tunisia have created specific structures to deal with the problems encountered and little by little are finding the same solutions as those adopted in host countries. Here intergovernmental organizations can provide assistance and share their experience: this would be a positive contribution on the part of these organizations to the International Literacy Year.

How does the right to cultural identity, recognized by intergovernmental organizations, manifest itself? Although the majority of host countries, in Europe in particular, have evolved towards the adoption of policies of integration, given the slim likelihood of foreign workers returning to their countries of origin, the right to cultural identity is recognized, notably via courses in the language and culture of origin (LCO) offered to students of foreign origin.

Some countries delegate the responsibility of organizing courses in language and culture of origin to national embassies and private initiatives; most European host countries have officially introduced such courses into their curricula.

On one hand, these courses aim to facilitate the scholastic reintegration of children in the case of repatriation; and on the other, the countries of origin show great interst in maintaining cul ural ties with their workers abroad and with their children. Lastly, it seems that host countries have come to the conclusion that the pupil's knowledge of his culture of origin improves his ability to integrate and avoids the creation of a rift between these children and their parents.

But many problems remain. Host countries in general set up obstacles to the integration of foreign teachers by refusing to grant them the same status as teaching nationals. And educational supervisors, inspectors and superintendents tend naturally to marginalize and neglect these courses.

At the request of their parents, migrant children can take a course in the language and culture of origin (usually three hours per week, in addition to their regular classes). Yet they are nevertheless prone to

experiencing certain cultural problems. The *values of the school are different from those of the family.* We are not dealing with academic, popular or folkloric culture, but simply standards of conduct which tell the child how to behave and which ideas to reject. There is often conflict at this level.

There exists a classroom culture, which is not necessarily open to other cultures, and thus is not favourable to integration. Likewise, foreign cultures are not always prepared to be integrated, and many values, for example concerning differences in the treatment of boys in comparison to girls or the treatment of elders compared to younger people, are jealously preserved.

The concept of intercultural education was evolved as a means of confronting these difficulties. According to this approach, language is considered to be the principle vehicle of culture, though culture can be expressed by numerous other means (visual arts, music, customs, etc.) If education is open to everyone, then each person is involved in it according to his individuality, and *open-mindedness towards others becomes an essential element of all educational practice.*

Many migrant children have mastered the language, the tool of communication. Hence all children – both nationals and foreigners – benefit in their development from this mixing of cultures. Starting from language as a basic communication tool, we can advance from language as the vehicle of culture to language as the creator of culture. This evolution needs to be emphasized: the concept of culture of origin is gradually being replaced by that of cultural contribution.

What can be done in order that all school children may enjoy the benefits of the cultural contributions of people of different backgrounds and nationalities? How can the transition be made towards a national culture which is enriched by the contribution of pupils resulting from immigration? How can the intention to integrate but not assimilate be put into actual practice,

Thus, intercultural education is a delicate process by means of which people build their systems of values, while avoiding the pitfalls of utopian universalism and the infinitely more pernicious risk of 'difference-worship'.

The extremely difficult conditions in which migrant workers live, the socio-economic exploitation which threatens them, and the poverty they know in many respects lead some people to insist that the situation must be clarified. Although the truth of this analysis cannot be denied, it must be said that it is not up to the school to remedy the situation, and that the solution proposed will not resolve all educational problems as such.

Let us avoid a facile ideological approach which dispenses teachers of their simple daily tasks. Let us reaffirm that whenever possible, the teaching of the language of the host country must be based on the initial dynamics of the mother tongue. Who would not be ashamed of laughing at the language of one's mother?

Remarks made by the director of the CEFISEM, Paris

UNESCO'S POINT OF VIEW AND ITS REACTION

The second medium-term plan ('Education for All') and the resulting activities carried out between 1984 and 1989 allow, within the overall framework of the 'promotion of the right to education of special groups', for activities benefitting migrant workers and their families: educational activities for workers, schooling for young people of the second generation, including the specific needs of migrant women, the place of native languages and cultures, the elaboration of teaching materials, exchanges of educators, operational pilot projects.

UNESCO

Unesco activities seek to promote:

- *the right of migrant workers and their families to education in all Member States, and to equal access to education and to educational opportunities;*
- *the respect of the cultural identity of workers;*
- *the cohesion of the migrant family.*

The objective is to encourage bilateral co-operation between the host country and the country of origin, to achieve constructive collaboration with specialized United Nations agencies, with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, with national commissions for Unesco, with associations of migrant workers and educational institutions and research bodies.

All activities in favour of the education of children must be situated in the overall perspective of the technical and vocational training of adolescents and adults, the education of parents, and adult literacy and education. Only an integrated programme will make it possible for migrants to adapt to their host countries, while preserving their cultural identity and acquiring the technical knowledge and skills likely to facilitate their re-integration into the social and economic life of their countries of origin, should they decide to return there.

Following the Second World War, Western Europe called upon foreign manpower (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa) to meet its industrialization needs. Literacy courses in the host country were systematically proposed to the workers themselves, either within the employment framework or via meetings after work.

Since 1970, as we have already indicated, the basic problem requiring attention is that of educating the children of migrants; the Council of Europe has devoted an important part of its educational activities to this area.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL COOPERATION

In the light of the work accomplished by the Council for Cultural Co-operation on the Education of Migrant Children, the necessity for an intercultural approach became clear. The European ministers and the Conference of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted recommendations calling for the elaboration of new programmes of study, the production of teaching materials, the adaptation of educational situations so as to dynamically integrate the cultural heritage of migrants within various European countries and move towards a genuinely intercultural form of education. The intercultural process is a process which ultimately leads to the reciprocal inter-penetration of different cultures:

- *it concerns all pupils and teachers, all subjects and all activities taking place in the classroom context;*
- *it creates the conditions for mutual respect and understanding, and*
- *it constitutes a real education in human rights.*

CONCLUSION

Political level directives are not enough to solve the problems related to the literacy training and education of migrants and their families. It is necessary to convince not only ministers, civil servants and institutions, but also teachers and public opinion in general. The public must be conscious not only of the disadvantages of immigration, but also of its riches. Mr Jones, President of the Education Commission of the European Communities, stressed a fact which is often not apparent:

> *Multi-ethnic and multi-cultural schools in major European urban centres today constitute veritable laboratories in which new practices related to cultural and linguistic diversity are being developed. These schools must be perceived and supported as places where the Europe of tomorrow is being formed.*

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The International Bureau of Education acknowledges with grateful thanks this contribution by Jean Valérian to the cause of Literacy. Mr Valérian is an honorary official of the Department of National Education and president of the Migrants Inter-Service Association in France.

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